

Remarks
Ambassador Lewis Lukens
Regional Workshop on Seizure, Confiscation, and Management of Proceeds of Crime in
West Africa and Establishment of ARINWA Network
Palm Beach Hotel, Saly
March 24, 2014

(As prepared)

Dr. Sidiki Kaba, Minister of Justice,
Representatives from UNODC, the World Bank and France,
Delegation members and distinguished guests.

Thank you for inviting me here today to welcome you to the Regional Workshop on Seizure, Confiscation, and Management of Proceeds of Crime in West Africa. This four-day event is organized by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)'s Global Program against Money Laundering, Proceeds of Crime and Financial Terrorism (GPML) -- with support of the U.S. Department of State, the Government of France and our hosts, the Government of Senegal.

I am proud to say that the United States Government is a strong partner of Senegal in many security-related areas. International security is constantly in flux. This past year, the prevalence of activities by AQIM, Boko Haram, and various rebel groups have highlighted the constant need for vigilance. We are living in a region that unfortunately seems to be becoming more and more dangerous. These recent events demonstrate that we need to be prepared for anything. This preparation includes strengthening our abilities to detect and seize profits gained from crime. As the American Ambassador to this country, I am very proud of our strong bilateral relationship with Senegal. This relationship has only grown stronger in the past year with President Macky Sall's visits to Washington and New York. President Obama's very successful visit here in June of last year was in large part to recognize Senegal's role as a leader in the region. This includes Senegal's leadership in security. So we believe it is vital that Senegalese financial and security professionals who help keep this country's financial industry secure -- like you -- understand the need for strong Financial Intelligence Units and regional networks.

Distinguished representatives of judicial authorities, law enforcement, and Ministries of Finance from the 15 ECOWAS member states -- plus São Tomé and Príncipe -- have gathered today for this important workshop. Your counterparts created the Camden Assets Recovery Interagency Network (CARIN) at a similar event in Dublin, Ireland in 2002. CARIN is similar to a network that you are probably more familiar with, the Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs). The Egmont Group provides a mechanism for FIUs to share information with one another. This information-sharing has enabled these FIUs to link more criminals, activities, and suspicious transactions across jurisdictions -- a necessary tool as our financial world grows more interconnected. You now have the potential to create a similar structure for West Africa. We are so happy that Senegal -- and all of you representing ECOWAS member states, plus São Tomé and Príncipe -- are part of this group of countries joining us today.

This workshop offers an opportunity to follow in the important footsteps of its predecessors -- CARIN in Europe and ARINSA in southern Africa -- to launch the Assets Recovery Interagency Network of West Africa (ARINWA). ARINWA will develop a network of regional practitioners that can work to develop local and regional strategies to improve existing asset seizure practices. This network will enable you to coordinate your work across the region. It will increase the effectiveness of your ongoing efforts to combat financial crime and confiscate the ill-gotten gains from crime. We can work together to strengthen cooperation from the starting point in the investigation, to the asset tracing, and finally - through ARINWA -- by reinforcing cooperation on asset forfeiture and confiscation. These last two areas are clearly critical, in order to deprive criminals of their illicit gains.

We believe that like the United States, ECOWAS, and São Tomé and Príncipe, want to prevent criminals from keeping proceeds of crime. We know that your countries also want to counter the use of these ill-gotten gains to wage acts of terrorism. I encourage all of the delegations here today to actively participate and be very generous in sharing your knowledge and experiences with each other. Your shared experiences and knowledge will be key, not only to your success during these four days, but most importantly for your success when you return to your jobs and continue to work together to fight crime.

I hope that you will also take the time to get to know each other. Friendships among yourselves - law enforcement officials and financial experts living in neighboring countries -- can contribute enormously towards fostering the true spirit of international security cooperation.

I would like to thank the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and the Government of France for helping to organize this workshop. And once again, I want to welcome our esteemed participants from the Financial Intelligence Units, investigations authorities, prosecuting bodies and agencies of the entire West Africa region. Welcome to Saly, Senegal and I wish you a successful workshop.

Thank you! Merci! Obrigado!